

HAYDN: Online Journal of the Haydn Society of North America

Volume 4
Number 1 *Spring 2014*

Article 6

March 2014

Mary Hunter and Richard Will, editors, Engaging Haydn: Culture, Context, and Criticism

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Recommended Citation

Korstvedt, Benjamin (2014) "Mary Hunter and Richard Will, editors, Engaging Haydn: Culture, Context, and Criticism," *HAYDN: Online Journal of the Haydn Society of North America*: Vol. 4 : No. 1 , Article 6.
Available at: <https://remix.berklee.edu/haydn-journal/vol4/iss1/6>

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Book Review: Mary Hunter and Richard Will, editors, *Engaging Haydn: Culture, Context, and Criticism*

by Benjamin Korstvedt

Mary Hunter and Richard Will, editors. *Engaging Haydn: Culture, Context, and Criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. ISBN: 9781107015142. \$103.00

<http://www.cambridge.org/us/academic/subjects/music/eighteenth-century-music/engaging-haydn-culture-context-and-criticism>

Taken as a whole, the twelve new scholarly articles in *Engaging Haydn: Culture, Context and Criticism*, a fine collection edited by Mary Hunter and Richard Will, demonstrate the breadth and depth of a vigorous mainstream of American musicology. This mainstream is neither greatly invested in archival research nor overtly committed to ideological critique, but builds on strong traditions of interpretive, contextualizing criticism, supported by analytic observations, that have flourished in recent decades in Haydn studies as elsewhere. Many of the articles are enriched by an expansion of the critical frame to encompass the new historical and interdisciplinary perspectives that are now part and parcel of musicological discourse. A more distinctive hallmark of *Engaging Haydn* is that a fundamental awareness of music as performance text—something that should be obvious, yet is often taken too much for granted—informs many, perhaps most, of the articles in the volume in some way, whether subtle or fundamental.

One of the outstanding articles in the collection, Mary Hunter's "Haydn's string quartet fingerings: communications to performer and audience," shares insights that accrue from an acute awareness that Haydn's music was written to be performed and thus gains its full measure of significance only through the act of performance. Hunter, who draws upon her wisdom as a performer as well as a scholar, focuses directly on Haydn's

music as performance text to argue that the directions about fingering Haydn included in the final text of some of his quartets are more meaningful than has previously been recognized. By providing a set of “physical instructions” to the players, they guide the expressive character of the music in performance and even influence the players’ attitude toward the composer’s text, especially when they go against obvious convention.

Hunter exemplifies these points with a passage in the reprise of the Adagio of Op. 17 no. 2, in which the first violinist is instructed to remain on the G string, even as the melody rises up to the e-flat a tenth above middle C (mm. 59–68). This manner of performance, she contends, shifts “attention away from the musical structure to the physical labor of playing it” in a way that is almost grotesque in its extremity (p. 295). In an interesting twist, Hunter suggests that this uncomfortable manner of performance paradoxically deflects our awareness past the performers, who would not choose such fingerings on their own, and back to the composer’s presence as the agent behind the music, even in his physical absence. This point links up with other thoughts in the article about what these notated fingerings may say about Haydn’s attitudes toward the audience of published chamber scores, perhaps even demonstrating that “Haydn wanted to leave what we might now call a virtual impress of his physical presence in the sheet music” that was destined for a wide audience of anonymous performers (p. 289).

Lewis Lockwood, who also speaks as long-timer performer of Haydn’s quartets as well as music analyst, offers a clear and insightful series of observations in “Imagination, continuity, and form in the first movements of Haydn’s Opus 77 Quartets.” His comments address what he describes as the “conjurer’s tricks” that Haydn pulls off just beneath the surface of this music (p. 147). By looking closely into the “micro-structural aspects” (p. 146) of these two movements, this essay take us behind the magician’s screen to give us a backstage view of how subtle motivic processes unfold and interact with the formal design. In a sense this article may seem modest in its claims, especially in contrast with Hunter’s, yet Lockwood offers a fine appreciation of the richness of Haydn’s motivic imagination that repays careful reading, especially with a score in hand.

Two of the articles take up established critical topics more commonly associated with Beethoven than Haydn. Nicholas Mathew's thoughtful essay "‘Achieved is the glorious work’: *The Creation* and the choral work concept" proposes that "the social conditions, reception habits, and aesthetic ideals that [Lydia] Goehr and others have habitually associated with the work concept were actually instantiated in and prompted by Haydn's *Creation* before any of Beethoven's symphonies were composed" (pp. 124–5). Mathew is, of course, not interested in simply determining priority, but rather in reconstructing a more historically grounded genealogy of the work concept, one informed by the late eighteenth-century context from which it emerged, instead of reading back from concepts we have inherited from the Romantic ideology of absolute music, as has become customary. He argues, quite persuasively, that the genre of the oratorio was the first linchpin in the rising aesthetic of the sublime, secular yet spiritual musical experience that later was to become so closely identified with the Beethovenian symphonic paradigm. In addition, he draws some important connections between the emergence of the work-concept aesthetic, the importance of preserving the authentic text that characterizes the ethic of *Werktreue*, and the commodification of music so typical of market-based societies.

In the second of these two essays, Jessica Waldoff carefully thinks through the question "Does Haydn have a 'C-minor mood'?" in closely considered, almost lapidary prose. In the process she strikes a number of illuminating sparks. Starting with Haydn's few instrumental compositions in the key, examined in conjunction with relevant works by Mozart, the article shows that conventions of key characteristics involved far more than matters of tonality. Just as important were musical gestures and procedures that typified certain keys, and the consistency with which particular keys were associated with particular affective states, "feelings of melancholy, unrequited love, and uncontrollable rage or horror," in the case of C minor (p. 169). Waldoff turns next to discuss the distinctive role played by C minor in Haydn's late oratorios, where as she shows, it is used for "the representation of astonishing and unrepeatable events" (p.

169), most famously Chaos in *The Creation* and the storm in *The Seasons*. Her concluding observations on the powerful earthquake that ends *The Seven Last Words*, which represents something of an extreme case of the tendency, are particularly interesting (pp. 178–85), as they highlight the generic roots of the utterly unresolved, apparently hopeless ending of this most profound Good Friday music, which creates an emptiness that is not to be relieved for two days with the return of Easter Sunday.

Among the more analytically oriented contributions, “Form, rhetoric, and the reception of Haydn's Rondo Finales” by Michelle Fillion is distinctly successful. It presents an unusually perceptive and well-informed long view of the development of Haydn's rondo finales. The article does outline and exemplify the various types of rondo finale that Haydn essayed over his career; thus it is, in a sense, an exercise in typology, but one that achieves a level of critical sophistication that is far from common. Fillion recognizes that previous scholars have run up against “the limitations of assessing Haydn’s symphonic rondo finales from the single-minded perspective of formal theory” (p. 188); therefore, she sets out with wider scope, notably alert to issues of performance and audience, to argue that for Haydn the rondo was “both a compositional and performance practice” (p. 189). Part of what makes Fillion’s analysis so refreshing is that she fully understands that form and style are at one and need to be treated as such (p. 205), and that she recognizes certain problems that have perplexed earlier critics to be issues attendant to modern interpretive paradigms, not real musical problems (*vide* her comments on the finales of Symphonies nos. 63, 66, and 69 on p. 198). Finally, she achieves renewed insight into the music of these movements by resisting the impulse to evaluate them, implicitly or explicitly, in terms of an inexorable drive towards the Beethovenian sonata-rondo. She glosses this as the “perennial question” in Haydn studies: “Are we there yet?” But as she reminds us, “With Haydn there is no *there*, only a flexible continuum of interwoven rondo and sonata principles” (p. 201). Fillion’s contribution amounts to an unassumingly original, even quietly brilliant, critical reappraisal of an important, yet elusive corner of the repertory that will repay attentive reading and should help to reorient the ongoing discussion of these movements and their formative principles.

Neal Zaslaw's informative, yet loose-limbed article "Haydn's orchestras and his orchestration to 1779, with an excursus on the Times-of-Day symphonies" raises a series of points concerning Haydn's first three decades as a symphonist. He reminds us that Haydn's famous claim that when he worked for Prince Esterházy he remained "set apart from the world" and thus forced to become original, is an overstatement if not misrepresentation, for, as Zaslaw argues, the composer carefully "kept himself and his orchestra abreast of developments in the rest of Europe" throughout those years (p. 304). In Eisenstadt and Esterháza Haydn performed a great range of music, encountered a steady stream of musical visitors from across Europe, developed a large library of music; in addition, he regularly spent time in the great musical capital, Vienna. Furthermore, Zaslaw points out that Haydn's symphonies were quite widely distributed before Haydn was contractually allowed to publish them starting in 1779, and he even wonders if Haydn himself "was sometimes responsible for his music 'leaking into the outer world,'" a suggestion that seems to ring quite plausibly (p. 306). This article, which is divided into six subsections, also comments on the style of Haydn's woodwind parts, which tend to fall into longer solos or accompanimental patterns than usually found in Mozart; on the makeup of Haydn's orchestra and how this might have inclined him to stick with fairly basic string writing; and the wisdom of the twentieth-century practice of selectively doubling the wind parts in Haydn, among other things. Finally, Zaslaw shares some of his thoughts on the three Times-of-Day symphonies (Nos. 6–8), concluding with the purely speculative suggestion that a fourth symphony may have been composed to complete the set by depicting "night." He even proposes that that missing work may be the one now known as No. 40 (p. 320). Zaslaw's pages in this volume may be slightly fragmentary, but they deserve close attention since they are informed by years of immersion in the world of eighteenth-century music.

As the editors point out in their introduction, vocal works, which have often been underplayed in Haydn studies, are unusually well represented in this volume (p. 5). Haydn's operas, Masses, and his oratorios all come in for discussion. More surprising is

that two of the articles revisit what may well be the most neglected of Haydn's vocal works, his songs. In an article entitled "Haydn invents Scotland" Richard Will rejects an older tradition that tries to estimate whether the composer's late settings of Scottish folksongs grasped the "spirit alive in the folksongs of the British Isles," as Geiringer felt, or rather if they were "at frequent, and often violent, odds" with it, as Landon felt (both quoted by Will on p. 45). Will instead recasts the discussion to take on board ideas derived from new approaches to both the study of folksong and the discourse about "the invention of tradition," in Eric Hobsbawm's influential formulation¹ (cited by Will on p. 44). Will proposes that rather than attempting to recreate the essence of Scottish folksong in his settings, Haydn's work "highlight[s] his personal creative agency" and projects his distinctive "authorial voice," even as they respect the integrity of the original melodies; thus these settings represent "a significant chapter" in Haydn's late style (pp. 45–6). Will supports this rather provocative proposition by considering several examples that show how Haydn's accompaniments reflect and comment upon the tunes and poems he set. This effectively reveals a number of telling differences of tone between the folk material and its new accompaniment and helps to bring out the musical subtlety of Haydn's craftsmanship. As this article suggests, Haydn's slightly ironic lyrical approach in these setting was out of step with emerging Romantic notions about *Volksgeist* and its specific modes of authenticity, a circumstance that led to the long eclipse of these works quite shortly after their appearance.

Katalin Komlós's "Haydn's English canzonettas in their local context" is less enterprising than its companion, yet does a good job of contextualizing these English songs both in relation to the genre of the late eighteenth-century canzonet and Haydn's London experience. In addition, the article surveys the style of these works so as to emphasize the role of the keyboard, which shows the distinct impress of Haydn's embrace of the full-toned English pianos of the time.

¹ *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

A number of the contributions in the volume that address the larger vocal works essay a basic approach that has become increasingly important in the field of musicology. These articles are based around what could be called “readings” of musical works that connect the music with various points of contextual contact. The most convincing of these—and perhaps not coincidentally, the most traditional of them—is Elaine Sisman’s gracefully authoritative essay, “Fantasy Island: Haydn’s Metastasian ‘Reform’ Opera.” Sisman weaves a finely drawn web of relevant historical connections—ranging from Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* to Haydn’s own marketing efforts—together with astute musical observations as she shows how Haydn’s *L’isola disabitata* fuses the seemingly incompatible influences of Metastasian *opera seria* and Gluck’s reform operas. The professional importance of Metastasio for Haydn in his struggling years in the 1750s is well-known, but not Haydn’s later engagement with Metastasio’s aesthetics, which, as Sisman argues, he honored in *L’isola disabitata*. Gluck’s impact on Haydn has also often escaped due notice, yet as Sisman helps us to see through a series of well-articulated interpretative comments and analytic aperçus, this opera bears the influence of *Orfeo ed Euridice* on several levels. This article is also a plea for the excellence of an often overlooked opera, Haydn’s only setting of a Metastasio libretto, whose merits Sisman helps us to see afresh.

A rather more adventurous attempt to draw connections between music and other cultural formations is found in Caryl Clark’s “Revolution, Rebirth and the sublime in Haydn’s *L’anima del filosofo* and *The Creation*.” The article starts as if through rose tints, with Clark’s Panglossian assertion that Haydn’s era witnessed the start of a Revolutionary process by which “the age of absolutism and the domineering rule of the aristocracy ultimately gave way to a fundamental liberalism whose strength lay in rationalist discourse, Enlightenment thinking and an empowered citizenry” (p. 100), before turning to a more focused consideration of the two works. In addition to shining a light on a neglected work—an Orfeo setting that was not to be performed in full until 1951—from Haydn’s first London years, Clark suggests some interesting parallels between it and its political context. She also proposes that elements of *L’anima del*

filosofo remained “percolating in Haydn’s psyche” some five years later as he conceived *The Creation* (p. 116). At times, the discussion feels bit strained in its speculation, especially since it is less deeply contextualized and theorized than one might wish. I particularly felt the absence of anything beyond the merest mention of Edmund Burke, an exact contemporary who wrote directly about the politics, ethics, and aesthetics of revolution. A fuller addressing of the questions of mediation underlying the proposition that *L'anima del filosofo* and *The Creation* manage to “articulate” the “sea change in fundamental worldview” in the wake of Revolution (p. 100) would have been welcome as well.

The two remaining articles make ambitious interpretive claims, and do so with a freedom and an intellectual zest that betrays their origins as graduate school seminar papers. Pierpaolo Polzonetti’s quite remarkable “Haydn and the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid” is speculative in its historical imagination. While such an approach may be preferable to one given to an excess of critical caution, pitfalls do lie along this path. Polzonetti claims that Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* was “as influential as classical rhetoric in shaping Haydn’s imagination and his organization of musical discourse” (p. 213). He builds his case, more plausibly than one might expect, by emphasizing the currency of Ovid in elite eighteenth-century culture and in Haydn’s works, several of which set texts derived from Ovid. (But is the suggestion on p. 220 that “*The Creation* uses Ovid as a source of both content and form” a bit of over-interpretation?) It is interesting that Polzonetti finds a connection to Ovid in the final act of *L'anima del filosofo* (p. 218–20) also pointed out by Clark (p. 116). In addition, the article considers Ovid’s art as an “illuminating analogy” for Haydn’s methods of thematic metamorphosis and his ability to exert “control over large-scale form” (p. 211). The parallels Polzonetti draws between Ovid’s tales and Haydn’s musical processes may be more than one can fully accept, especially since they skirt the question of where and at what level such a connection exists or existed. A key phrase in this portion of the article, and indeed in much similar work, is “may have” (as in “how the reading of Ovid may have influenced audiences of Haydn,” p. 227). In the end, this proves to be a learned and thoughtful essay, which—at

least for me—raises some valid yet unexpected ideas (as well as an eyebrow or two), but it may leave the reader feeling, “yes, but . . .”

Tom Beghin’s “*Credo ut intelligam*: Haydn’s reading of the *Credo* text” is also ambitious. It offers a detailed pair of analytic readings, complete with full voice-leading graphs of the *Credo* settings in the “Creation” Mass and the “Nelson” Mass, which derive, as the author tells us, from work he did twenty years ago in a graduate seminar led by James Webster. These analyses are offered in support of a reading that contends that in these settings Haydn sought to compose a “symbiosis of text and music” that in effect created as a “communal ‘speech act’” that expressed central articles of Christian faith (p. 242). Beghin pushes his interpretation quite hard, yet it remains open to question how convincing this argument can be as a demonstration of Haydn’s specific intention to provide musical explication of nuances of enduring Christian articles of faith. Among other things this would presuppose an approach to text-music relationships more characteristic of Protestant and especially Romantic practices than those of an old Austrian Catholic like Haydn. Notwithstanding this, the essay proves to be a worthwhile and intelligent exercise in interpretative analysis. In particular, it demonstrates how marvelously different these two setting of the same text are in structure, tone and emphasis. And although Beghin does not emphasize the point, his analysis offers a welcome corrective to the common belief that Haydn’s Mass settings are not spiritually deep nor tightly connected to the text.

In a very real sense the most important contributor to this volume is James Webster. Although he did not contribute an article, his presence is palpable throughout. Not only is the volume dedicated to him, his work is cited repeatedly—twenty publications of his are listed in the bibliography—and, above all, the spirit of this exceptional teacher-scholar suffuses the work that appears between the covers of the book. Each of the contributors is either a close colleague of Webster’s and/or a former student, so this volume, which is in effect a *Festschrift* in his honor, is valuable as a human document as well as a compendium of finely informed and consistently thoughtful musical

scholarship. Nothing could be a better tribute to the great and positive impact Jim has made, and continues to make, on the field of Haydn studies and on those fortunate to have had the opportunity to study, work, and learn with him.

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